

Such is the case around the farmstead of Mr. Kvinge. This summer many old friends and newcomers nested in his groves around the edge of the pond and on the adjacent prairie. There were Arkansas and Common Kingbirds; Barn and Cliff swallows; Brewer's and Red-winged Blackbirds; Hungarian Partridge and Sharp-tailed Grouse; Mallards and Willets and Marbled Godwits; Baltimore Orioles, Yellow Warblers and House Wrens. Catbirds nested there in company with Black-billed Cuckoos and White-rumped Shrikes; Killdeers and Avocets reared their young; while young crows looked out over the prairie from their nest on top of the highest tree watching the "baby" Burrowing Owls as they peered from a hole in the bank - wide-eyed at a new and inviting world. On August 10th one Hungarian Partridge hatched out twenty young and another pair, fifteen. A day before this a new covey of fourteen Sharp-tailed Grouse made their first acquaintance with the prairie.

Those of us who live in towns and cities, highly prize the very few species that make their homes in our back yards. What a thrill it would be to have visitors and nests galore!

R.R.2, REGINA -- Doug Gilroy

Our readers always enjoy interesting facts and accounts of unusual activities, observed among our feathered and other animal friends. If all members of this Society would jot down these personal observations and submit them for publication in the BLUE JAY we would have a nature magazine second to none in Canada. Will each reader take the cue from those who have so generously contributed this time, and help to bring our next issue nearer to our ideal.

We are very fortunate in getting this description from Mr. Gilroy of the gull colonies of Last Mountain Lake.

"Last May 30, Mr. Fred Bard, Director of our provincial museum, was making one of his field trips to Imperial Beach and invited me to come along to try my luck in photographing the Ring-billed Gulls and Pelicans. For this opportunity I was more than grateful. Fred Lahrman, Mr. Bard's assistant, had already been there camping and was observing the wild life for the previous ten days or so.

The gull colony, which consisted of both Ring-billed and California, was on an island not far from shore. This was indeed a sight to behold for we estimated there to be between 1800 and 2000 nests in this one group. One had to be careful where he put his feet for fear of stepping on the eggs. I was stationed here while the other two went down the lake to observe the pelican colonies and to band the young. Getting pictures of the gulls was anything but difficult. There were so many of them, and the urge to incubate their eggs was so strong that all one had to do was to sit still among the nests and the owners would soon gather around, screaming and yelling at each other as each settled on her individual nest.

Each nest was very jealously guarded by its owner, and if a neighbor came a bit too close he was fiercely lunged at. The eggs, about the size of a pullet's, were dark and speckled. Two or three eggs made a clutch and were laid in a bed of sea-weed on the sand.

That evening, when back on the beach eating supper, we could hear the gulls screaming and clamoring and we all agreed that it sounded for all the world like a girls' softball game. We stayed at the beach for another day and a half, but due to high winds and rough water we were unable to get out to the islands, and so photography for this trip was over.

Black-billed Cuckoos

Mr. Gilroy attributes the large number of Black-billed Cuckoos, which appeared in his district during June and July, to the prevalence of Tent Caterpillars in the same area. Did this condition prevail in other parts of the province?

He was fortunate in finding three Bittern nests this summer. One of them had three eggs in it and each of the other two, five.

The "Doggiest" Nest

"Near the end of June," writes Mr. Gilroy, "our dog began to shed his hair. It clung to him like matted wool, so one day I curried it out. The same day an Arkansas Kingbird began to build its nest in a tree beside the house. In a very short time it spied the curried dog-wool --- and that is what most of its nest was made of. Several other birds nested nearby, but Mrs. Kingbird had the "doggiest" nest in the yard."

Horned Larks

"The Horned Larks are one of the first birds to nest in the spring, but how late do they nest? On July 19 I found two nests, one with five young about a week old and the other with four eggs; then on July 24 I found another nest with four eggs.

(We hope that others will tell us their observations in this respect. ED.)

NAICAM - W. Yanchinski

Lingering to bid a welcome to newcomers, Lapland Longspurs first appeared in this district May 18. Two days later an estimated 100 to 200 were seen in flocks preparing to take off for the north and their nesting grounds. That was the same day that Barn Swallows were first noted. They appeared daily and on June 27 a pair nested in my granary. A week later the swallow abandoned this site - House Sparrows filled the nest with twigs and other trash.

The first Nighthawk was seen on the woodpile on the morning of May 20. On August 14 a flock of about a dozen flew about over a nearby pond. The Catbird was first heard May 20 and was seen almost daily. A pair nested near the house. Other birds which visited the district were: House Wren, May 19; American Finch, May 22; Black-capped Chickadee, May 29; Sharp-tailed Grouse, nest found in the combine straw, May 29; Least Flycatcher appeared first May 13 and a nest was found June 12; Baltimore Oriole, May 18; Cedar Waxwing, May 27; Vesper Sparrow, May 16; Yellow-headed Blackbird, June 17; White Pelican, June 29; Black Tern, June 30; American Bittern, May 20.

A family of Ruffed Grouse, including about half a dozen half-grown birds, comes almost daily to within a few paces of the house to feed on their favorite weeds.

BURNHAM -- Arthur Ward

Mr. Ward is one of our most enthusiastic observers of bird life. His keen interest has been developed by his remarkable success in bird banding. There seems no doubt that if more of us would develop this fascinating hobby, our knowledge of birds and the pleasure we would derive from observing them

would be increased beyond measure. His interesting reports follow:

The May Frost

The severe frost that destroyed all fruit on May 22, also took a tragic toll of bird eggs. I found some nests with eggs deserted and other nests, which were known to have contained eggs, were missing. The leaves of the trees were gone, making it difficult for the birds to find the usual suitable places.

Cowbirds Take Over

Redwing Blackbirds usually build in small congregations of five or six pairs. It was these I examined first. Their nests had a paper, rag and string foundation, lined with root fibre. One of these contained three cowbird eggs and three of its own; the others had one cowbird egg in each. In spite of the fact that I took out the intruders' eggs, the next visit revealed that the blackbirds had given up the site and left it to the cowbirds.

It was evident that these birds had taken over our little bird sanctuary. On approaching a wren box I noticed one trying desperately to find a way into the box; it would poke its head into the small hole, then go around pecking at the sides, trying to pry the lid off. Finally it gave up. We had to shoot three cowbirds to give the other birds a chance to start housekeeping.

Our Yellow Warbler

I have an arbour in the garden, glassed all round, which I use for an office. From there, I do the bird-trapping observations. A Virginia Creeper grows thickly around, covering the glass. A Yellow Warbler built its nest six inches from the glass in the creeper, enabling me to watch every movement. A cowbird added its eggs to the first warbler eggs. I took out the cowbird's egg and next morning there were two warbler eggs. By noon one of these was missing and next morning, expecting two warbler eggs, there was just the one cowbird egg. It would seem that the cowbird had ejected the warbler eggs. I now disposed of the cowbird and its eggs, hoping that the warbler would commence to lay again - which it did after two days. The first was laid June 21st and on the fourth three days later. On July 4th the last one was hatched, just thirteen days after the last one was laid. After the first egg was hatched incubation seemed to take care of itself; the temperature at that time was about 80 degrees.

I did not see the male bird feed the female, but the latter left the nest for a short spell each day. Both parents carried food, consisting of grasshoppers - one to each bird. If it was extra large they would first push it down the throats of three, as if to soften it up, then finally give it to the fourth. Sometimes one parent would bring food in the form of pellets which were distributed evenly. Each parent, after feeding, would hesitate until one of the young ones would raise its hindquarters, even if it had to struggle from beneath. The parent would then take the excrement without its touching the nest and carry it away. Sometimes there would be no need but it always waited a moment to see. The most the young were fed was seven times in ten minutes, but the rate varied from time to time.

On the second day they could take a full-sized cutworm moth with legs and wings. It would be pushed head first well down their throats. On the fourth day pin-feathers were formed and they rested their heads on the side of the nest. On the night of the fifth day, just before dark, I was doing some

repairing inside the arbour which required some hammering. Unfortunately, I did not look to see how they had taken it. Next morning the nest was empty and they could not be found. Evidently the noise had caused them to jump out of the nest. I was very disappointed in not being able to follow them through until they were fully fledged.

A few days after, I examined the nest and found that they had built one above the other. Expecting to find a cowbird egg to be the cause of this, I was surprised to find a warbler egg in the bottom of the nest. In the first laying, three eggs only had been accounted for. This must have been done before I discovered the nest in the first place.

Incidentally, I had banded both of the warbler parents previous to their nesting.

Hyhfield Dam

A visit to this irrigation project covering 1200 acres, six miles east of us, revealed that where the water level had been kept for the last few years, a fringe of trees about eight feet tall was occupying the shore line. The water level has now been raised, leaving the trees about thirty yards from shore.

Many kinds of water-bird nests were observed along the fringe, including: Eared Grebe, American Coot, Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Willets (I banded four of these), and Sora Rails. Nearly every kind of shore-bird was there, including four Great Blue Herons, 10,000 ducks and 500 Herring Gulls.

Having no boat, we were not able to take advantage of what would have been an interesting study. Here again we encountered the cowbird. A small colony of Redwing Blackbirds had left the cowbird eggs waiting for a sitter. If the cowbird does any good, it is greatly offset by the damage it does and should be put in the same class as the Magpie. Just imagine in a bird sanctuary, like ours, a small bird rearing a cowbird instead of, probably, two broods of its own. A Magpie does announce its presence, but the cowbird sneaks up to one's doorstep without anyone knowing, and plies its nefarious trade.

Bird Banding

Two pairs of Arkansas Kingbirds nested in the sanctuary this summer. Two nestlings, just ready to fly were banded. Five pairs of Kingbirds (Tyrannus) nested and I banded two of these which I caught in a trap. This is very unusual as it is extremely difficult to induce them to enter a trap. Twenty-six cowbirds were banded, twenty-three of which were adults. However, only three of their nests were found here. We do not allow the Shrike in our little sanctuary, but greatly to my surprise one followed a yellow warbler to a trap and tore its head off before I could get to it.

This year, 286 birds of 32 species have been banded. Those birds not having been banded here before are:

- 1 Yellow-breasted Chat
- 2 female Baltimore Orioles
- 1 Yellow-throated Warbler
- 1 Western Flycatcher
- 1 Townsends Solitaire.

SASKATOON -- A. McPherson

Following on with his splendid report, which appeared in our last issue, Mr. McPherson has given us a comprehensive over-all picture of bird life in Saskatoon and its immediate district. Like Mr. Ward, Mr. Street, Mr. Bard, Mr. Houston and others, his interest has been keenly sharpened by his bird-banding operations.

The Nesting Season

"Around Saskatoon we have not a great many birds to choose from. At the Hudson Bay Slough (the only body of water except the Saskatchewan River, we have close to the city) - the mallard population was good, a big increase over last year. Of the many broods that hatched, they were all up from seven to fourteen, with the exception of one or two. Pintails were scarce but more were around than last year. Three years ago they were very plentiful; this year three broods only were found. Their scarcity is probably due to the lack of water in pot-holes and sloughs. Blue-winged Teal are on the increase. So far I have noticed fairly large broods. In numbers Bald-pates are next to Mallards this year. They are numerous at the Slough, but the broods are rather small - from four to seven.

This year we have two broods of Canvas-backs; one with four and the other with seven. I have only seen one brood of Ruddy's, although there are quite a few pair on the Slough. There are also several pair of Lesser Scaups and two pair of Gadwalls, but, as with the scaups, no broods have been seen. Coots are more prevalent than last year and quite a number of these have nested.

This spring I was obliged to shift my duck trap. I picked a spot close beside a Coot's nest which had nine eggs in it. I'm sure the pair of them didn't like the idea at all. Everything turned out all right, however, for they all hatched - but many a time they "told me plenty".

Two pair of Horned Grebes, and two pair of Pied-billed Grebes were also found with young. The Black Tern population was larger this year but I cannot give any reason for this. In one instance I found two females who seemed to be using the same nest. Many of the nests have several eggs.

Sora Rails were on the increase; Red-winged Blackbirds were about the same; Savannah Sparrows were not so plentiful as early observations indicated. The Arkansas Kingbird is on the increase; I have listed several pairs in town. I came across several of their nests and noticed that most of them hatched out only one bird. I do not know if this is a common habit or not.

This year I trapped nearly a hundred robins as compared with twenty last year. This increase may be due to the difference in some of my bird traps. Catbirds, Brown Thrashers, Clay-coloured Sparrows, Flickers and Hungarian Partridge seem to be scarce this year. Grackles, Brewer's Blackbirds, Vesper Sparrows, House Wrens, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Meadowlarks, Orioles, Barn, Bank and Tree Swallows, all have appeared in about their usual numbers. Killdeer Plovers and Yellow Warblers are unusually common.

On July 10th I saw quite a number of Lesser Yellow-legs, these being the first imigrants on their way south. Ten days later I saw Dowitchers and Wilson's Phalaropes, Least Sandpipers and Semi-palmated Sandpipers. On the 25th of July I noticed several Greater Yellow-legs, Marbled Godwits and Western Willets, all moving south. I have also noticed the following in migration,

several of which I have banded: Song Sparrows, House Wrens, Lincoln Sparrows, Flickers, Chipping Sparrows and Robins.

WAUCHOPE -- Marion Nixon

The bird population, low last winter, was even lower this summer. There were fewer birds per species rather than fewer species. We thought the last snow of spring might be the cause of fewer birds then, but there were fewer birds later on too. I tried to shoot magpies in the shelterbelt, hoping this would help the situation. My son shot the five young as they were getting restless in the nest. This caused the adults to move.

We have had Cedar Waxwings nesting about a quarter of a mile from the house this year, but lately they moved to the farmyard with their young. I am told they nest up Moose Mountain way every year but this is the first time we have noted them during mating season.

GRENFELL -- Mrs. John Hubbard, Jr.

Vandalism

In our last issue Judge McKim, of Melfort, and Clifford Shaw, of Yorkton, told of the prevalence of Red-tailed Hawks in their respective districts. These items reminded Mrs. Hubbard of a case of their wilful destruction on their farm.

"My husband reports a rather far-fetched piece of vandalism", she writes. "Last year, when harvesting, he threw a fallen tree out of the crop. It was a tree that shortly before had had a Red-tail's nest with young in it. An examination of the stump this spring showed that the tree had been cut down with an axe. Some "bird lover", in his attempt to destroy a beneficial bird, had gone on someone else's land, cut down a tree, and left that tree where it would be in the road of field work".

A Near Tragedy

"Another bird story concerns a Bluebird who survived having a bin turned completely over on him in a recent storm. Mr. George Hubbard saw his animate tail sticking out from beneath the bin's roof and dug away some loose earth. --- The Bluebird flew away".

An annual meeting will be held in Regina College and in the Provincial Museum of Natural History on October 21 and 22, 1949. Wildlife films will be shown and the whole make-up and policy of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society and the "BLUE JAY" will be discussed. More complete programs may be obtained upon inquiry. Please let us know if you can come to Regina for these days.

TORCH RIVER -- C. Stuart Francis

We saw the first Bobolink to be recorded in the Torch River district recently and I am wondering if this is a northern record for them. Also

reappearing this spring were the Catbird, Brown Thrasher and Baltimore Oriole, which are some of the more recent residents in this northern area.

My pair of Canada Geese have a fine family of five young goslings. Only five eggs were laid and all hatched on May 29.

REGINA -- Clara A. Taylor

Many nature lovers are the first to confess that their present interest in the habits, oddities and characteristics of wild life is not an inherited but an acquired attitude. The hobby is developed due to a close association with others whose interests are bent in that direction. It is a contagious pastime so often shared by every member of the family.

Such a nature fan is Mrs. Taylor, whose husband, Jack, never misses an opportunity to greet an unfamiliar bird or to welcome a newcomer. With an uncanny exactness he can identify it a "mile" away. Unconsciously his enthusiasm becomes the common property of those about, one of whom is nearly always Mrs. Taylor. She writes:

"While sitting in the car in the 2300 block Hamilton Street a couple of weeks ago (June 23), I saw a pair of Bronze Grackles on the grass quite near the pavement, feeding a young bird. There was very little traffic at the time and I was able to observe quite plainly. The male seemed to me to be doing most of the feeding. While he was away getting more food, the young bird had moved a couple of feet away on the grass and stood quite near the pavement and facing it. He would have had to stand in front of it and on the pavement which, of course, must have been hot. Instead of doing that, he stood on the grass beside the young one and pushed it two or three times with one foot until it moved into a suitable position to be fed.

It really was most unbelievable and had I heard of it instead of actually seeing it, I might have thought it fantastic".

BLADWORTH -- P. Lawrence Beckie

Bank Swallows

An interesting observation I made on July 22, gave me a pleasant surprise. While hauling gravel I discovered a colony of Bank Swallows, nesting in the walls of the pit. The pit is dug in the south side of a large hill which forms a part of a chain of hills on the east bank of Arm River.

The soil at the top of the pit is clay-sand and very easy to dig. The colony dug their homes a few inches to three feet from the top. There are many holes along the top but all are not occupied. The holes are oblong, being about one and a half by two inches wide. I counted twelve birds flying about the hills.

This may be a common sight to some observers but to me it was a new discovery in Nature.

(Some more descriptions would prove of interest to those who have not seen these colonies. ED.)

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In our last issue Mr. Coates of Leask, and Miss P. Summers of Yorkton, each described a bird with which they were not familiar. Mr. Beckie has hazarded an opinion. He wonders if the bird at Leask could possibly be the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, although aware of the fact that the bird is of rare

occurrence in Canada. The bird, referred to by Miss Summers, he believes is the Harris Sparrow. He has heard their song, similar to the one described, during spring migration.

SHEHO -- William Niven

Just after we had gone to press last time a letter was received from Mr. Niven, giving a full account of the spring bird migrations from March 4 to June 12. Over a hundred birds were listed as they first appeared, together with interesting comparative notes about their prevalence, unusual times of arrival and early nesting records. It is the most complete account of bird arrivals that we have received and our congratulations are extended to a keen and observant Naturalist. Unfortunately we will be unable to publish this list. There are a few facts, however, that we should mention.

From April 25 to May 1, large flocks of Horned Larks passed through Sheho which seemed quite different from the resident birds. They were redder on the back, had black faces and their chest markings were not so distinct. They were a slightly smaller bird than the ordinary species and no horns were noticed. Mr. Niven is of the opinion that they were a northern race in migration. (Comments from Taverner appear below.)

The first Horned Lark's nest, with four eggs, was seen on April 16 and the young were hatched before the end of the month. (There is a long time from this date to the last hatching, reported by Mr. Gilroy, during the first week in August.) The Canada Geese and Mallards also nested very early. A nest of the former with seven eggs was found near Salt Lake May 1, and one of the latter with ten eggs, the next day. The House Wren and Palm Warbler appeared on the scene May 4. These are also early records. (Mrs. Runyan, of Punnichy reported seeing the first House Wren this spring on May 7.)

An American Osprey was seen May 10, flying low in a northward direction. This is the first certain record for this species at Sheho. The myriads of Franklin Gulls in August would indicate that they came to us in increased numbers this year, but Mr. Niven is the first to report that fact. Unusually large flocks in migration were seen June 1.

HORNED LARKS

Taverner has this to say about these birds: "Few birds have been divided into as many, or as puzzling, sub-species as the Horned Lark. In Canada we have a northern and southern series of sub-species distributed across the continent, the northern ones being, in each case slightly but consistently larger than the southern neighbors. Across the more southerly parts of Ontario and Quebec we have the Prairie Horned Lark, extending westward into Manitoba. West of the range of the Prairie Horned Lark is the Desert Horned Lark, of the same size as the latter, but decidedly paler, the vinaceous of the upper parts is reduced to pinkish, and the brown back stripings are largely concealed with greyish. This form occupies most of our central prairies and southward. Some authorities divide this into two races, the northern of which enters Canada and is known as the Saskatchewan Horned Lark, but it has not been accepted in the check list. North along the central Arctic coast and extending eastward in the islands above, is Hoyt's Horned Lark. It approximates

the large Eastern Lark in size, but the forehead, eyebrows and face are white. The throat may be pale yellow or white. In summer, the body colors are bright and contrastive, with much strong ruddy. It migrates through the Prairie Provinces. At higher elevations through British Columbia and lower in the Yukon and Alaska, is the Pallid Horned Lark. It is another large race, paler than the Prairie or Hoyt's, but darker than the Desert. The throat is always white. It migrates throughout the prairies, perhaps as far east as Manitoba. East of the Coast range in southern British Columbia the Streaked Horned Lark may be found. It is the smallest of our Canadian Horned Larks and the darkest and reddest in color, with underparts usually showing faintly yellow below and black gorget.

The differences between some of these races is not very marked and even the expert must have an ample series of specimens for comparison before making decisive identification."

Take your choice, Mr. Niven.

REGINA -- Elizabeth Barker

Fall Migrations

The following is a report to August 14 of bird migrations as observed at my home at 3035 Argyle St., along with other observations of general interest:

Blackbirds, as usual the first to move, passed overhead in mid-July. On the last day of that month 26 Black Terns were noted; later these were seen in large numbers on Wascana Lake. On August 1, Horned Larks were beginning to assemble in flocks. On August 14 a flock of twenty were seen in the city. On August 8, Meadowlarks were beginning to fly around and indulge in early morning gymnastics with one another and on that same day Barn Swallows congregated in small groups, one of which sat on the wires over my door. The first Franklin gulls seen since July 20 appeared in flocks on August 11, coming in from the south-west and going south-east. This flock, numbering perhaps two hundred or more birds turned back and whirled upwards and away toward the west, showing up like a flock of sparkling stars in the sky. I think possibly they were feeding on grasshoppers, as these insects were in flight that day.

On August the first, small flocks of Robins, gathering together for their southern trip, were seen across the street on light wires. Two weeks later came the crowning flock around my door at 7.30 in the morning. There were fifty or more birds, all of them young, with speckled breasts. Their presence was strongly resented by the other birds in whose summer area they were intruding. First came the Meadowlark down among them, in true helicopter style, direct from above. He drew himself up and began to threaten with his spear-like bill. Next came the Kingbirds and gave every robin which they could persuade to fly a real good chase. Just at this time a pair of Orioles came into my maple tree in the front yard searching for insects. As they left the tree and rested for a moment on the light wire they were attacked and driven away by the Arkansas Kingbird.

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Miss Barker also reports that the following birds nested around her city home and yard this summer: three Meadowlarks in the shelter of the house

in two separate broods; one Chestnut-collared Longspur; one Clay-coloured Sparrow and four Barn Swallows. Young Orioles were observed in a nearby tree on July 28.

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MORE REPORTS FROM BURNHAM

Just before going to press we received some further interesting notes from Mr. Arthur Ward. His enthusiasm for birds always remains at a high pitch.

"There has been an unusual visitation of immature Clay-coloured Sparrows here. A few had been trapped before July, but later they became very numerous and I have banded 120. Now, I am turning them loose without bands. Every time I look towards the traps there are three or four in each and several outside. I have turned scores away. Strange to say, there are no adults.

There are also a great many Yellow Warblers. I had not banded more than six on other occasions, but I have banded forty this year. Like the Clay-coloured Sparrows, they are not repeating.

There are no signs of migration yet (August 25), except one Red-breasted Nuthatch, one immature Magnolia Warbler and one Townsend's Solitaire. These I have banded. In all, up to this date I have banded 436 birds of 33 species."

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An Unlucky Flicker

Merele Wershler, a member of the Simpson public school Nature Club at Yorkton, reports that on August 23 he saw a Blue Jay swoop down to the lawn where a Flicker was feeding. The Blue Jay struck the Flicker in the breast, knocked the victim over and flew away with him.

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We are very sorry to learn that one of our faithful contributors and bird enthusiast, Stuart Houston, has been laid up with a crippled knee this summer.

After five weeks of discomfort an operation was performed on it in Winnipeg, August 13th. Stuart writes that he is making a good recovery and hopes to be about on crutches before the end of August. He has been given the assurance that he will be walking without support when Medical College resumes again on September 12th. The BLUE JAY wishes him a speedy and thorough recovery.

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"Ponds are great crystals on the surface of the earth. Lakes of light. If they were congealed and small enough to be clutched they would be carried off like precious stones; but being liquid and ample, secured to us and our successors, forever, we disregard them. How much more beautiful than our lives; how much more transparent than our characters. Nature has no human inhabitant who appreciates her. Talk of heaven! Ye disgrace earth!"

--- Henry Thoreau